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DONIZETTI;

HIS LIFE AND WORKS.

BY M. DE THÉMINES.

Translated for the ART JOURNAL from the French,
BY MARGARET CECILIA CLEVELAND.

II.

We will pass rapidly over the first years of the new musical education of Donizetti. The interest attached to them will be very mediocre. Simon Mayr had tested the soil, he had found it excellent, he redoubled his efforts to render it fruitful; and the pupil, in his turn, seemed to endeavor to struggle zealously, so that his master should not have misrepresented him.

Strange caprice of nature! Those who knew Donizetti at the height of his celebrity, his friends above all, know how guttural, harsh—let us say the word—disagreeable his voice was in singing. It would be useless to add that he only used it when he wished his compositions heard by his intimate friends or his publishers. Well, the first time that the name of Donizetti appeared in public was on the occasion of the annual exercises of 1809. Young Donizetti then sang a rôle in the *Alcide* of Me-

tastasio, which Mayr had set to music. And we shall astonish our readers very much in informing them that he had an excellent contralto voice!

His success, his aptitude, the talent he displayed in his classes, won him the honor of being named, with two of his comrades, Marangoni and Bonesi, *répétiteur*; the first for the voice, the second for the violin. As for Donizetti, he had the class for the piano.

It is well known that the author of *Lucia* was a finished pianist. It is true that it was a *coquetterie* which he did not display to the same extent as Rossini; but he possessed it, and retained it to his maturity. He adored the piano. Those around him soon perceived it; but, let us hasten to add, they did not complain of it.

There now happened to the three little musical triumvirs what had happened three years before to our three consuls, Bonaparte, Sieyès and Cambacères: the power concentrated itself in one person, and soon there was a First Consul who left far behind him the two others:

Et du Premier Consul déjà par maint endroit
Le front de l'Empereur brisait le masque étroit.

In like manner, the future composer, the maestro, the author of so many remarkable works, was revealed through the young *répétiteur* giving himself up to efforts at musical composition.

It was Donizetti who the oftenest corrected the manuscript of his colleagues—(they had promised to submit to each other their essays, and mutually to correct them)—who soon recognized his superiority, and—it is only rendering them justice—they did it gracefully, so true is it that intellectual, like physical, strength always and inevitably commands respect.

This little study plot was not a secret to the Professor, although the three conspirators, if they had not taken the oath of the Three Swiss, had at least promised not to speak of it. They feared that the master would think them too presumptuous.

Simon Mayr had the good taste to appear unconscious of the cabal of the three *maes-*

trini, as they call in Italy the *répétiteurs*. He left them to themselves, and smiled beneath his beard.

Still, as the Professor could not entirely keep himself in the background, it followed that one fine day he surprised the three young people in the flagrant act of composing. In vain did they attempt to conceal their music, the master could not, whatever had been his good intention, have feigned not to have seen it. He presented, in a manner, the air of the *curé* who enters one *Friday*, in a cottage, and there finds the family at dinner, eating—meat!

"Let us see these scribblings," said he, playing the bugbear. The *maestrini* were obliged to exhibit them.

"Hum! Hum!" murmured Mayr, as he ran over a sonata of Bonesi's, and I no longer remember what cavatina of Marangoni's. "Here are unpardonable faults. The devil! is there any sense there? I do not say that all is bad, no; but it is necessary to study yet, and a great deal. These young people! They doubt nothing. They think that music is made as one writes a letter. Let us see the other." (*The other* was Donizetti's.) "A symphony! Nothing but that! Well, you have not been presumptuous! Why not at once an opera, or an orchestrated mass? They wish to commence where others end! It is the world upside down, my word of honor!—*Tiens, tiens!*—but that is not so bad—that is, for a pupil."

Simon Mayr hastened to add this last phrase in the disguise of a correction, fearing to awaken the self-love of the young author. But his secret opinion was that the symphony was better than he had expected.

He then read over attentively the music of young Gactano, and instead of the hums! that he had uttered in so marked a manner when examining the two others, he gave almost involuntary utterance to expressions of "Good!" "Very good!"—which caused the young author to open his large azure eyes.

"Do you know, my boy," at length said Mayr, when he had finished reading, "do you know what you have written there is very

gcol? Somewhat bold, a little rash even, but as a whole there are excellent points. It is only necessary to overcome some stiffness in the counterpoint. As far as that, there is taste; the theme is well developed; that will do. Continue, my dear boy, and if you do not become discouraged, you will become something or some one.

"Yes, my children," continued the Professor, emboldened and becoming exhilarated, so to say, by his own prophecy, "Yes, Donizetti will become a great master."

These last words were remembered, and Simon Mayr, later, was proud of having uttered them at an epoch when they were only in the future.

The lawyer Cicconetti, who published in Rome, three or four years ago, a biography of Donizetti, which we will have occasion to quote from in the course of this work, did not fail to put in *relievo* this curious incident.

What appears singular, and we will add almost improbable, of this young and fecund musical improvisatore, is, that in his youth, and above all when he was *répétiteur* under Simon Mayr, he passed the most of his spare hours in the study and analysis of the German masters! He, who later was one of the most charming melodists, paled during long nights under volumes of Beethoven, Haydn, Handel, Bach, Hummel, etc. He sought in these great harmonists the secret of their wise combinations; he here learned the severe laws of counterpoint, in which he soon became an adept—no displeasure to the austere critics who often accused him of mistakes, and even faults, in harmony.

As the melody flowed easily and spontaneously from his rapid pen, they inferred that he was not strong in the science of music. The poet, to their minds, could not be a mathematician. This allegation may be true regarding poetry and mathematics, but melody and harmony, so easy as may be the former, as learned as may be the latter, are not always exclusive. For example, what is true for Pacini is not for Mercadante. See, rather, Verdi. But he was not yet of this world when Donizetti made his debut.

In devoting himself to music, the young *Bergamasque* knew that he would have to center there all his efforts. He therefore gave himself up to it with an ardor that no one would have accredited to him, at least, as no one would have foreseen such persistence. Nevertheless this ardor did not cool. His rest from long and severe studies was in playing various instruments. We have spoken of his perseverance with the piano. But this perseverance did not prevent his giving hours to the flute, the contra-bass and the organ. He was also very fond of singing; the beautiful contralto voice of his younger years, however, soon took a graver tone, and finished by becoming not a voice of bass quality, but a mixed organ, harsh, and even sometimes false. In all cases, if the singer had not shone by the sonority and *timbre* of his voice, he would have made an excellent master of singing and of the true Italian school, so greatly he distinguished himself for grace and precision. It was the contest between art and nature—and art triumphed.

In the same time he strove to cultivate his mind, to work as if music was only a noble pastime for him. The Abbé F. B. Baizini did on his part for the young man what Mayr had done for the musician. He taught him the Latin tongue, the Italian language, Poetry, History, Mythology, Geography and Mathematics.

Poetry above all was useful to him later,—when weary of running after librettists, whom he had also wearied, or not finding any at hand when he was pressed, could sketch verses for himself. It was thus that he constructed and versified the little operetta *Il Campanello*, which was exhumed only a few months ago at the *Fantaisies Parisiennes*. But let us not anticipate events.

(From the Sunday Times.)

JOHN HOWARD PAYNE.

BY W. B. M.

I became acquainted with Payne in Washington, many years before his death, which occurred at Tunis, in the summer of 1852. His name having been familiar to me from boyhood as the author of "Home, Sweet Home," awakened attention and led me to observe him closely. In stature he was below the ordinary size, being not more than five feet six inches in height. He was quite bald, and over his beard, as well as the hair on the sides of his head, age had shed its prophetic snow. His complexion was florid; his eyes large, blue, and full of expression. There was something extremely winning in his manners, from which an air of refinement, more easily recognised than described, was never absent—an ease, a collectedness, a certain propriety of bearing, hitting the just medium between reserve and familiarity, apparently spontaneous, but in reality the fruit of seeds of long and varied intercourse with all ranks sown in a soil of previous culture.

Payne exhibited the bias of his mind towards literary pursuits very early in life. At the age of thirteen, when a clerk in a mercantile house in the city of New York, he employed the little leisure afforded him in secretly editing a periodical called "The Thespian," devoted to literary and theatrical criticism. The precocious talents he displayed attracted the regards of a benevolent gentleman, who probably foresaw that he was

"A clerk fore loomed his father's soul to cross,
Who penned a stanza when he should engross,"

and he, nothing loth, was taken from the counting-house and placed by the liberality of his benefactor in Union College. An ode, in six stanzas, on the thirty-first anniversary of American Independence, written by him as a collegiate exercise, is still preserved. The first stanza runs thus:

"When erst our sires their sails unfurled
To brave the trackless sea,
They boldly sought an unknown world,
Determined to be free.
They saw their homes recede afar,
The pale blue hills diverge,
And liberty their guiding star,
They ploughed the swelling surge."

He left college, however, without completing his under-graduate course, owing to the misfortunes of his father in business, and his filial aid was now required in support of the family. For the purpose of rendering this assistance, he went upon the stage, and made his first appearance, as Young Norval, at the Park theatre, New York, in 1809. The enthusiasm created by his youth and talents was so great that his admirers pronounced him superior to Master Betty, and the career to fortune seemed to be clear before him. He appeared afterwards with much favor in different cities in the character of Young Norval, Edgar, Hamlet, Selim, Romeo, Tancréd, Octavian, Frederic, Rolla, Achmet, and Zaphna. The incongruity of one so young,

with such a boyish figure, and the burly tyrants and stout generals represented, was sometimes very marked, and gave rise to many ludicrous incidents. Wood, in his "Personal Recollections," mentions one which occurred at Baltimore, and which was related by a learned judge who had been crowded out of the boxes by the ladies and had taken refuge in the gallery. "Master Payne was enacting Rolla, while a lot of youngsters were sitting together, some of them not particularly interested in what was going on before them. When they were coming to the scene in which Rolla seizes the child of Cora—who in Master Payne's instance was as large as Payne himself—and runs across the bridge with him, (a very effective scene when the Rolla is a large and powerful man,) one of the youngsters called his companions to order, and, as an inducement to them to leave their talking, urged, 'Now, boys! look out, and presently you will see one of those little fellows shoulder the other and run away with him over that plank,' pointing to the bridge."

Three short years brought Payne's popularity to a decline, as the receipts of the houses—that unerring theatrical barometer—but sadly testified. The liberality of a few friends and admirers in Baltimore, where he had always been especially popular, enabled him to visit England, for which he sailed in January, 1813. When he reached London he played a short engagement, and then made a tour through the provinces. He met with indifferent success. Leslie, in his autobiography, refers to him and his plans at this period. He was present one of the few nights Payne played at Drury Lane, in company with West, the painter, who, with other Americans then in London, turned out to support their countryman. But an actor cannot long be buoyed up in this way. The truth is, that Payne had been a precocious boy, and like so many other youthful prodigies whom the stage has witnessed, his attraction, depending upon that period of life, ended with it. Master Betty, with whom, as has been noticed, Payne had been compared, stands at the head of these infant phenomena. His wonderful popularity resembled Jonah's gourd in its growth and decay, but while it continued reminded the poetical reader of the prediction in Cowper's "Task"—

"The theatre, too small, shall suffocate
Its squeeze'd contents, and, more than it admitted,
Shall sigh at their exclusion, and return
Ungratified."

He received (exclusive of benefits) for twenty-eight nights at Drury Lane, £2,782. Spanish painters were not ashamed to depict Pizarro reading a letter—Pizarro, who could neither read nor write. Such adulation, however, is not peculiar to painters of any country. Northcote painted Betty in a Vandyke costume standing near the altar of Shakspeare.

Sculpture did not lag behind her sister art. The marble image of Betty appeared in the galleries, drawing attention away from learned judges and famous captains, and often in situations which must have reminded some spectators of the epigram written after the full-length statue of Beau Nash was placed in the pump room at Bath, between the busts of Pope and Newton—

"The statue placed these busts between,
Gives satire all its strength;
Wisdom and Wit are little soon,
But Folly at full length."

Betty, more fortunate than Payne, realised a fortune while the furor lasted, and still lives